

# Reading Jewish Columnar Birth Records in Russian

“How to” Guide, Intermediate Level: Instruction

January 2023

## GOAL

This guide will teach you how to extract information from Jewish birth records.

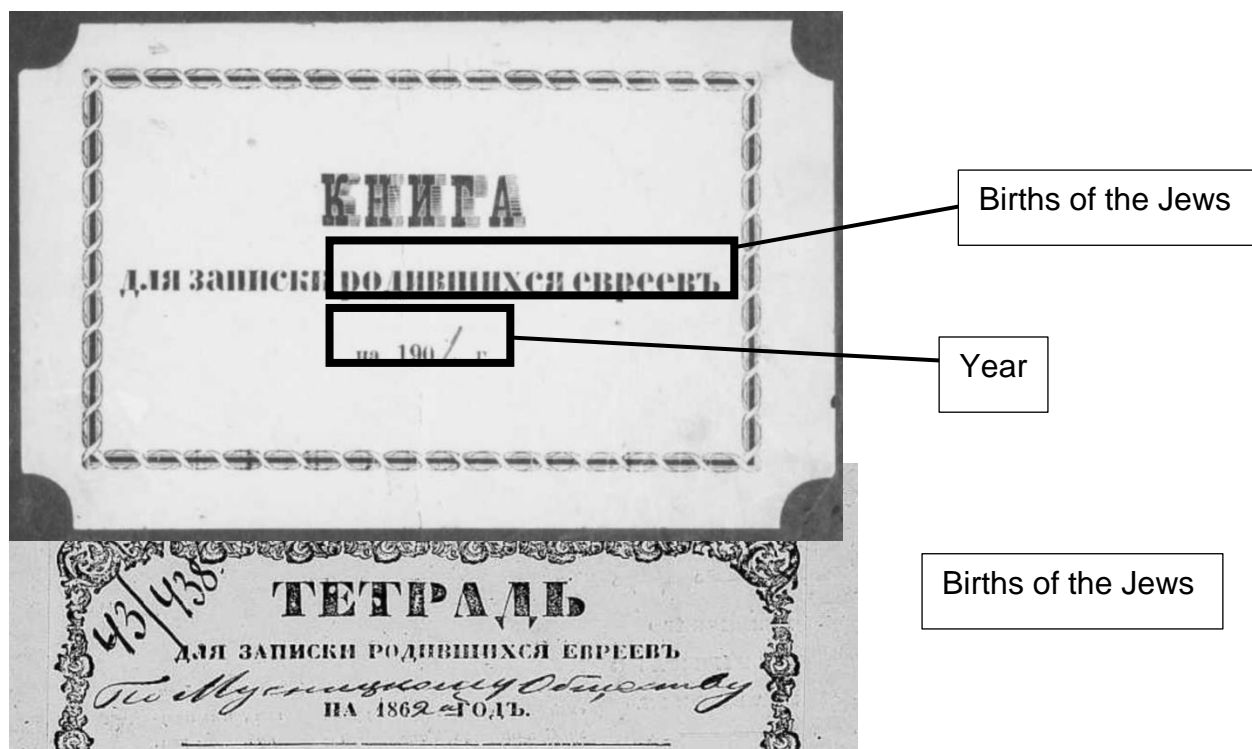
## INTRODUCTION

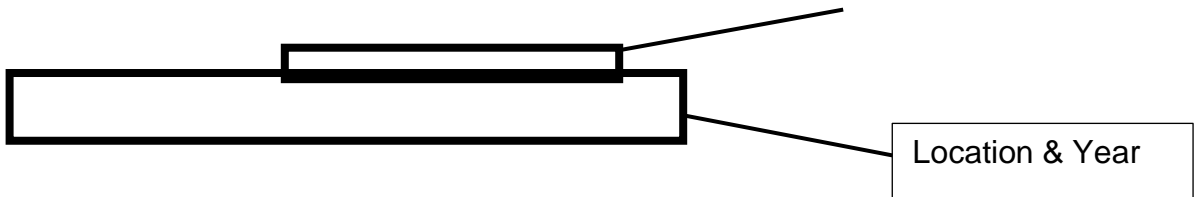
Jews in the Russian Empire were required to keep records of birth, marriage, and death beginning in 1835. These records were often recorded in both Russian (left-side of document) and in Hebrew/Yiddish (right-side of document). Although both sides of the document typically contain the same information, it's always a good idea to translate both sides, as there may be more information in one side as compared to the other. This “How to” Guide will address the side of the document recorded in Russian. In order to most effectively use this guide, you should be familiar with old Russian handwriting. If you are not, you may want to consult the following “How to” Guides before continuing:

- [The Russian Alphabet](#)
- [Deciphering the Handwriting and Understanding the Grammar](#)

## HOW TO

Jewish vital records, or metrical books (метрические книги), for a particular location are typically organized by year, and then in four sections by record type (in some cases it may be organized first by record type and then year). Birth records are found in the first section, and usually have a title page at the beginning of the section as seen in the examples below.





In some cases, the name of the shtetl, or Jewish town, was handwritten on the cover page. The title page may also contain Hebrew or Yiddish.

Jewish columnar birth records span two pages as shown in the example below. The information on the left-hand side of the page was typically recorded in Russian, while the information on the right-hand side of the page was recorded in Hebrew (in some cases the page sides may be switched). This guide will address only the portions of the document recorded in Russian. Although both the Hebrew and Russian versions should contain the same information, there may be more details in one language versus the other. It's a good idea to read both sides of the document.

ЧАСТЬ I—О РОДИВШИХСЯ.							ЧАСТЬ I—О РОДИВШИХСЯ.						
№	Кто совершал	Число и месяц рождения и обращения		Где	Состояние отца, имени отца	Кто родился и крестился или ей дано имя.	№	Кто совершал	Число и месяц рождения и обращения		Где	Состояние отца, имени отца	Кто родился и крестился или ей дано имя.
Женского	Мужского	Христианский	Еврейский	рождения.	и матери.		Женского	Мужского	Христианский	Еврейский	рождения.	и матери.	
142	Хасиды Шмидович	15	25	В. 2.	Младовичевский	Шмидович	142	Хасиды Шмидович	15	25	В. 2.	Младовичевский	Шмидович
		22	3	Колот	и матери. Шмидович	Номе			22	3	Колот	и матери. Шмидович	Номе
127	—	16	26	—	Земельский и матери. Земельский	Шмидович	127	—	16	26	—	Земельский и матери. Земельский	Шмидович
128	—	17	27	—	Земельский и матери. Земельский	Шмидович	128	—	17	27	—	Земельский и матери. Земельский	Шмидович

Image from: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-L9GQ-NB1Z?i=513&cat=1061906>

## COLUMN HEADING TRANSLATIONS

See below for a translation of column headings.

1. No.	2. Who performed	3. Date and month of birth and/or circumcision	4. Birthplace	5. Father's social estate,	
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a. Female	b. Male	the circumcision	a. Christian calendar	b. Hebrew calendar		names of the father and mother	6. Name of the child
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ЧАСТЬ I.—О РОДИВШИХСЯ.							
№	Женского. Мужского.	Кто совершалъ обрядъ обрѣза- нія.	Число и мѣсяцъ рожденія и обрѣзанія.		Гдѣ родился.	Состояніе отца, имени отца и матери.	Кто родился и како ему или ей дано имя.
			Христі- анскій.	Еврей- скій.			
" 142		Хайкель Шклярскій	15 22	25 Ава 3	Въ г. Ковин	Мидвиковскій мѣщанинъ Тер- шонъ Шоломовъ Гутманъ, его жена Застеръ Неха	Шлома Ноте ✓ ✓

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-L9GQ-NB1Z?i=513&cat=1061906>

**1. ENTRY NUMBER:** The entry number is split into two columns: 1a – female, and 1b – male. The number in this column means that child was the x<sup>th</sup> female or male child born or recorded that year.

**2. CIRCUMCISION:** This column contains the name of the mohel or rabbi who performed the circumcision. Note that this column is blank for females as they were not circumcised. Keep in mind that the name of the mohel or rabbi may be recorded once at the top of the page and then dittoed (") down for all male children on that page.

**3. DATE:** The date column is divided into two sub columns – column 3a containing the date of the birth and/or circumcision according to the Christian calendar and column 3b containing the date according to the Hebrew calendar. Again, as females are not circumcised, you'll find that male children have two dates recorded in each of these columns (for a total of four dates). The date of the birth was recorded first, often followed by a slash or dash (/ or –) and the date of the circumcision. Circumcisions usually took place 7 days after the birth. In some cases, the month is only written at the top of the page, or even just once at the beginning of the month. You may need to scan the surrounding entries and/or pages to find the birth month. The examples below show the months of the Christian and Hebrew calendars in genitive case, which is most common in these records; however, you may find the months with different grammatical case endings, or even in an abbreviated form.

#### Christian Calendar Months

Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)	Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)
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January января	Январь	July июля	Июль
February февраля	Февраль	August августа	Август
March марта	Март	September сентября	Сентябрь
April апреля	Апрель	October октября	Октябрь
May мая	Май	November ноября	Ноябрь
June июня	Июнь	December декабря	Декабрь

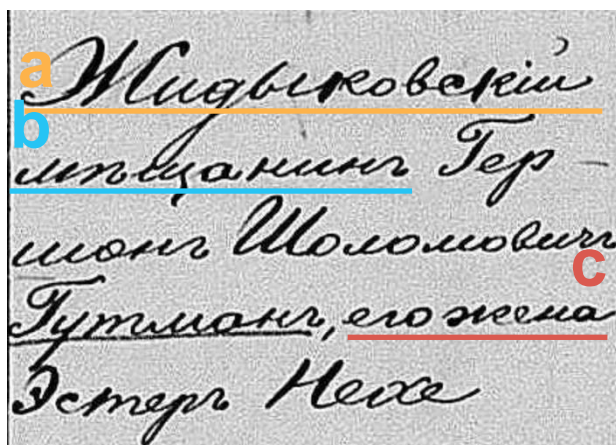
#### Hebrew Calendar Months and When they Usually Fall

Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)	Month	Handwritten Example (Russian)
Shevat (Jan-Feb)	Шват	Av (Jul-Aug)	Ув и ава
Adar (Feb-Mar)	Удара адора	Elul (Aug-Sept)	Элула
Nisan (Mar-Apr)	Нисона	Tishrei (Sep-Oct)	Тышрей
Iyyar (Apr-May)	Ияр Ияр	Heshvan (Oct-Nov)	Хешвана
Sivan (May-Jun)	Сивона	Kislev (Nov-Dec)	Кислев
Tammuz (Jun-Jul)	Таммуз	Tevet (Dec-Jan)	Тейвесс

**4. BIRTHPLACE:** The birthplace of the child is recorded here. In some cases, if all children on a

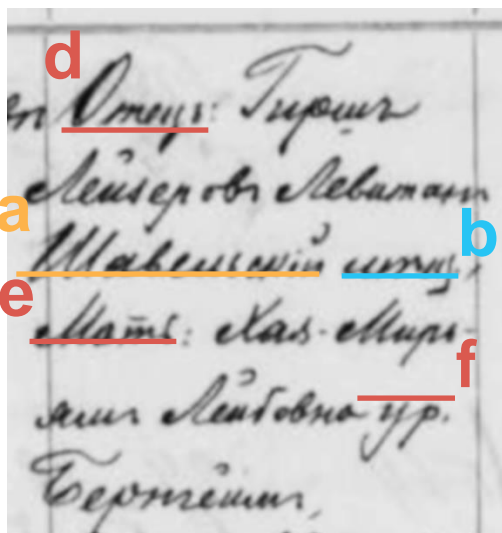
page were born in that location, the name of the location will be written sideways in the column across the entire page or dittoed (") down for all entries on the page. For help deciphering locations, transliterate the town name and use the [JewishGen Communities Database](#) to help you determine the location.

**5. PARENTS:** This column contains information about the parents including social estate, registration place (which may be different from actual residence place) and names. The mother's maiden name was not always recorded. Keep in mind that the paragraph within this column may vary in format, but below are two general representations of typical column entries.



#### Translation and Record Outline:

[Location/place of registration]<sup>a</sup> [social estate]<sup>b</sup>,  
[father's given name] [father's patronymic]  
[father's surname] and his wife<sup>c</sup> [mother's  
given name] [mother's patronymic].



#### Translation and Record Outline

Father:<sup>d</sup> [father's given name] [father's patronymic]  
[father's surname] [location/place of registration]<sup>a</sup>  
[social estate]<sup>b</sup>  
Mother:<sup>e</sup> [mother's given name] [mother's patronymic]  
born as<sup>f</sup> [mother's maiden name]

\*The father's location/place of residence and social estate may precede his name rather than following his name.

\*Note that the mother's maiden name was not always recorded. In many cases, just the mother's given name and patronymic was written.

**a. Location:** The paragraph typically begins with the residence (or place of registration) of the family. In some cases, the location may be in adjectival form (for example with a -овский or -янский ending), as shown in the example below. Remove the adjectival ending and use the [JewishGen Communities Database](#) to help you find the original shtetl name.

Мидыковский → ЖИДЫКОВСКИЙ → ЖИДЫКИ

Жидыки = Zhidyki = Židikai, Lithuania

If a person was from a town located outside the district the record was recorded in, the district they were from (often in genitive case) may be listed, as shown in the example below.

*Бѣльскаго уѣзда  
Немировскій*

Бѣльскаго уѣзда  
Немировскій  
Bielsk Uyezd (district)  
Nemirov (Niemirow, Poland)

**b. Social Estate:** In the Russian Empire, each person had a certain place in society, known as their social estate or *soslovie*. They were often recorded in metrical books. The most common estate listed in Jewish records can be seen below. See the [Russian Genealogical Word List](#) for other variations. Keep in mind an occupation may be listed instead of a social estate. Again, see the Russian Genealogical Word List for help. In some cases, the father's name will follow the social estate or occupation. The father's given name, patronymic, and surname will be listed. For more information about patronymics, see:

[familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian\\_Empire\\_Personal\\_Names#Patronymics](http://familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian_Empire_Personal_Names#Patronymics)

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Town Dweller/ Petty bourgeois	Мѣщан(ъ)/ Мѣщанин(ъ)	<i>мѣщанин</i>

**c. His Wife:** The father's surname may be followed by the phrase *его жена* – his wife. The wife's name and patronymic will follow the phrase.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
His wife	его жена	<i>его жена</i>

**d. Father:** In some records, the word father will appear, followed by a colon and the father's given name, patronymic, and surname. For more information about patronymics, see:

[familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian\\_Empire\\_Personal\\_Names#Patronymics](http://familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian_Empire_Personal_Names#Patronymics)


English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Father	Отец(ъ)	<i>Отец</i>

**e. Mother:** In some records, the word mother will appear, followed by a colon and mother's given name and patronymic.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Mother	Мать	<i>Мать</i>



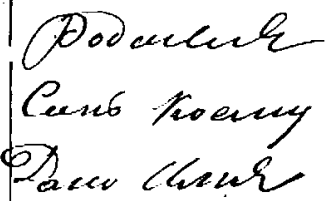
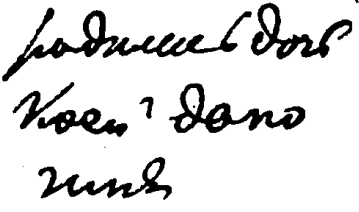


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**f. Born as:** The mother's maiden name was not always recorded; however, if it was recorded, it often followed the Russian word for "born as" (née). This word is commonly abbreviated as shown in the handwritten example below.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Born as (née)	ур.(abbreviation) урожденной	

## 6. NAME OF CHILD

The last column contains the name of the child. In some cases, words such as son, daughter, male child, female child, given the name, etc. may be placed in front of the child's name. See below for common examples. Check surrounding entries to see which words are repeated over and over again to help you know which words might be names and which could be identifiers.

English	Russian	Handwritten Example
Son	Сын(ъ)	
Daughter	Дочь	
A son was born who was given a name	Родился сын к нему дано имя	
A daughter was born who was given a name	Родилась дочь к ней дано имя	
Boy Child	Младенец(ъ)	
Girl Child	Дѣвица	

Boy Child	Ребенок(ъ)	Ребенокъ
Girl Child	Ребенка	Ребенка

## JEWISH NAMES

Jews in the Russian Empire generally had three parts to their name: a given name, patronymic, and surname. Some individuals may have a double given name. See the charts below for common male and female given name handwritten examples.

A patronymic is a middle name derived from the given name of the person's father. These typically end in -ov (-ов) or -ovich (-ович) for males and -ova (-ова) or -ovna (-овна) for females. For more information about patronymics, see:

[familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian\\_Empire\\_Personal\\_Names#Patronymics](https://familysearch.org/en/wiki/Russian_Empire_Personal_Names#Patronymics).

A surname was passed through the male line and a woman adopted her husband's surname when she married. For more information on Jewish surnames as well as a list of Jewish surnames in the Russian Empire, see Alexander Beider's *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*.

Some handwritten examples of common Jewish given names can be found below. You may also wish to visit

[jewishgen.org/ukraine/files/infosheets/L\\_Handwritten\\_Samples\\_of\\_Male\\_Given\\_Names.pdf](https://www.jewishgen.org/ukraine/files/infosheets/L_Handwritten_Samples_of_Male_Given_Names.pdf) or [jewishgen.org/ukraine/files/infosheets/L\\_Handwritten\\_Samples\\_of\\_Female\\_Given\\_Names.pdf](https://www.jewishgen.org/ukraine/files/infosheets/L_Handwritten_Samples_of_Female_Given_Names.pdf).








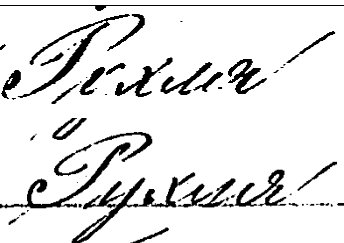
### Common Male Names and Examples

Abraham Abram Avraham	Абрам(ъ)	Абрамъ
Aaron Aron Aharon	Арон(ъ)	Аронъ
Chaim	Хайм(ъ)	Хаймъ
David	Давид(ъ)	Давидъ
Gersh	Герш(ъ) Гершко	Гершъ

Isaac Yitzchak	Ицко Ицак(ъ)	Ицко
Joseph Josef Yoseph Yosef	Іосиф(ъ) Іосеф(ъ)	Іосифъ
Judah Juda Judka Yehuda	Юдка Юда	Юдка
Leib	Лайб(ъ)	Лайбъ
Leizer	Лейзор(ъ)	Лейзоръ
Meir Maier Mayer Meyer	Маер(ъ) Маѣр(ъ)	Маеръ
Mendel	Мендель	Мендель
Moses Moshe Moyshe Mosko Moszka	Мошко	Мошко
Shmuel	Шмуль Шмуель	Шмуль
Wolf Volf	Вульф(ъ) Вольф(ъ)	Вульфъ

Yankel Jacob	Янкел(ъ) Янкѣл(ъ)	
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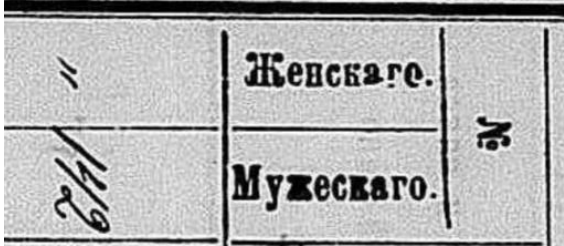
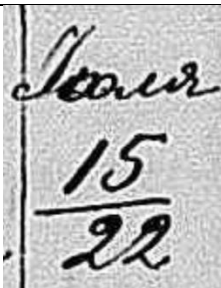
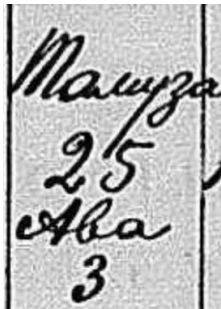
### Common Female Names and Examples

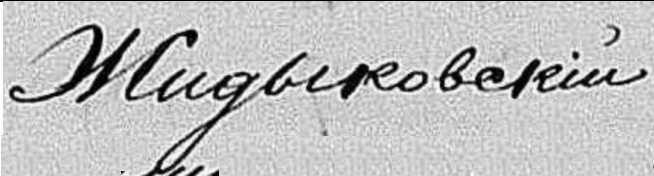

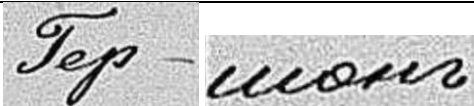
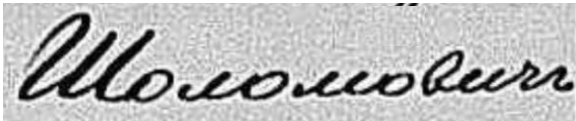
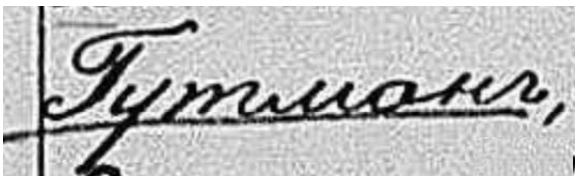
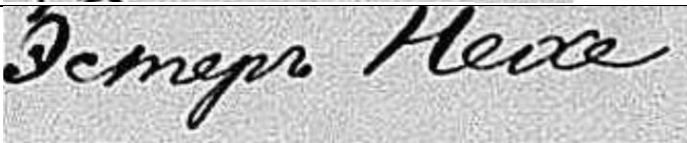
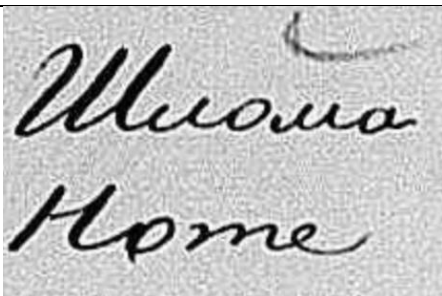
Chaya Haya	Хая	
Deborah Devora Dworja	Двойра	
Esther Ester	Эстер(ъ)	
Feiga Feyga Fegi Feyge	Файга	
Gittel Gitel	Гитля	
Golda	Голда	
Leah Laya Leigh	Лая	
Rachel Rakhael Ruchla	Рохля Рухля	

Rebecca Rivka Riwka	Рывка Ривка Рифка	<i>Ривка</i>
Sarah Sara Sura	Сура Сара	<i>Сура</i>

## PRACTICE

Now that we have learned about the key words, let's practice reading the record above by extracting the important genealogical details.

Was the child a male or a female? How do you know?	Male, because the entry number was recorded in the "male" column. There was also a circumcision date recorded.	
What was the date of birth and or circumcision according to the Christian calendar?	Birth: 15 July 1893 Circumcision: 22 July 1893	
What was the date of birth and or circumcision according to the Hebrew calendar?	Birth: 25 Tammuz Circumcision: 3 Ava	

What was the place of registration for the father?	Жидыки/Zhidyki (Židikai, Lithuania)	
What was the father's social estate?	town dweller/petty bourgeois	
What was the father's name?	Гершон(ъ) Шоломович(ъ) Гутман(ъ)  Gershon Sholomovich Gutman	  
What was the name of the mother?	Эстер(ъ) Нехе  Ester Nekhe	
What was the name of the child?	Шлома Ноте  Shloma Note	

## ACTIVITY

Now, test your skills you have learned in this “How to” Guide. The Activity is a way to check your knowledge and let you know you’ve mastered the Guide! Click [here](#) to try out the Activity.